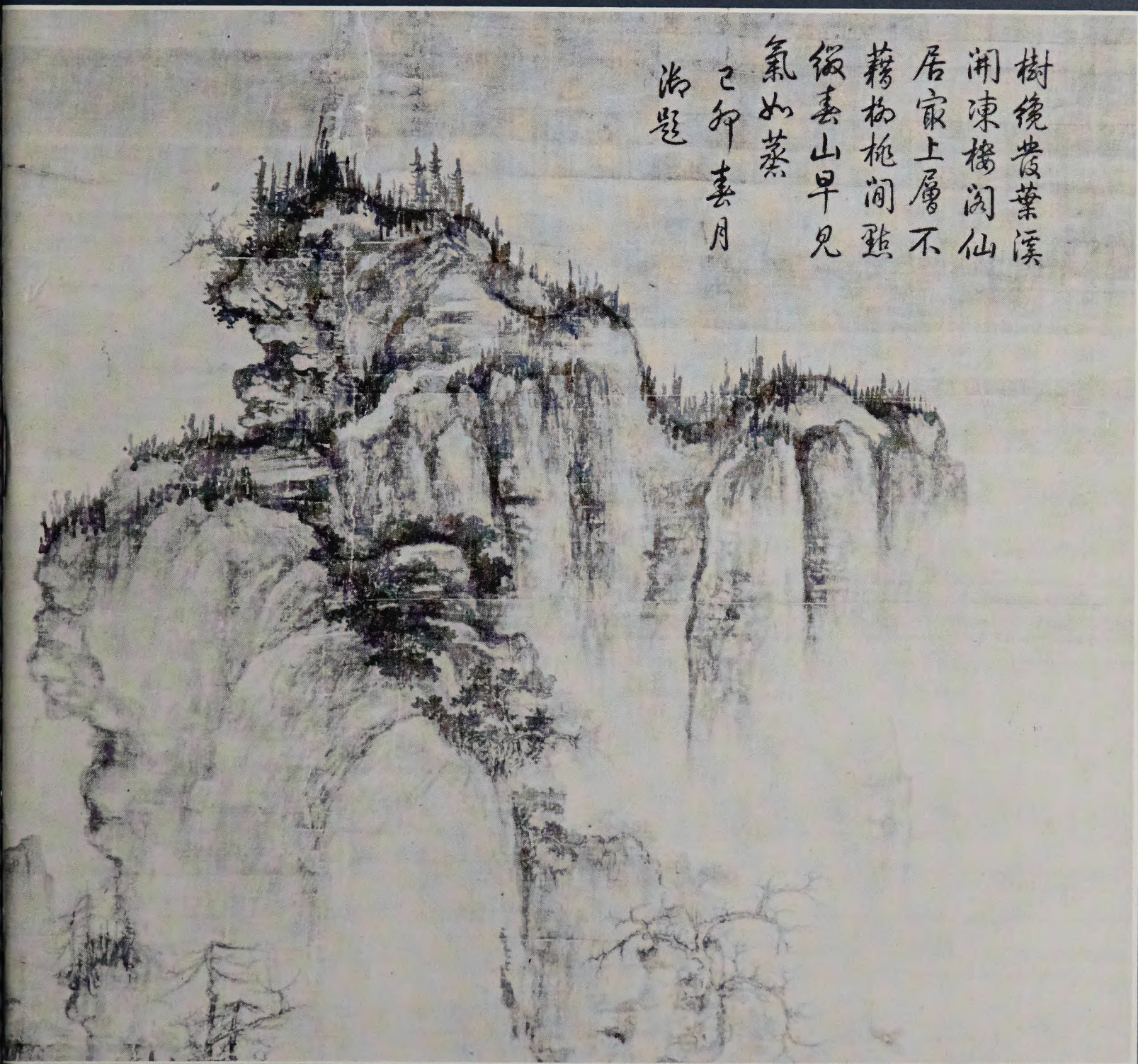


Chinese Painting

樹繞黃葉溪
開凍橋閑仙
居寂上層不
藉松栢間點
綴春山早見
氣如蒸
己卯春月
張題





EX LIBRIS
UNIVERSITATIS
ALBERTENSIS

Bryan-Gruhn
Anthropology
Collection

Chinese Painting

Social Studies Inquiry Program

Richard Gross and John Michaelis, Directors



ASIAN STUDIES INQUIRY PROGRAM

Chinese Painting

David L. Weitzman

Department Chairman
Oakland Technical High School
University of California
Demonstration Secondary School

John U. Michaelis

Robin J. McKeown

Coordinators
Asian Studies Inquiry Program
Co-Directors
Asian Studies Curriculum Project
University of California, Berkeley

Field Educational Publications, Incorporated

A Subsidiary of Field Enterprises, Incorporated



San Francisco, California Polotone, Illinois Berkeley Heights, New Jersey Atlanta, Georgia Dallas, Texas

Acknowledgments

For permission to use material in this book, acknowledgment is made to the following publishers and authors:

"Ling to A. D." by André Malraux, trans. by Robert Hollander. Copyright © 1961 by Random House, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. "Art in East and West" by Benjamin Rowland, Jr. Reprinted by permission of the publishers from Benjamin Rowland, Jr., *Art in East and West*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright 1954, by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. "The Forest and the Trees in Chinese Painting" by Sherman E. Lee. Reprinted from the *National Palace Museum Quarterly*, Vol. I, No. 2, Oct. 1966, with kind permission of the *National Palace Museum Quarterly*, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China. "On Tao and the Tao," "Fundamentals of Painting" by Mai-mai Sze. From Mai-mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting*, Bollingen Series XLIX (Copyright © 1956 by the Bollingen Foundation, New York). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press. Footnotes have been omitted. This is now available in a one-volume edition published by Princeton University Press for the Bollingen Foundation, 1967. "The Artist's Choice of Materials" by Laurence Sickman. Excerpt from "General Introduction," *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting in the Collection of John M. Crawford, Jr.*, ed. by Laurence Sickman. Reprinted by kind permission of Laurence Sickman and The Pierpont Morgan Library. "Chinese Calligraphy" by Chiang Yee. Reprinted by permission of the publishers from Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Abridged from pp. 107-108, 110-111, 114-115, 119, 130-132.

Front Cover and Title Page: Details from Plate 17 from the Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

Copyright © 1969 by Field Educational Publications, Incorporated. All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form without written permission from the publishers.

Contents

Introduction	7
East and West: Contrasts and Parallels	
1. Ling to A. D.	9
2. China Anticipates Modern Europe	13
3. They All Look Alike to Me	18
The Way of Painting	
4. On Tao and the Tao	23
5. The Painter Views Nature	26
6. Comments on Landscape	29
The Language of Painting	
7. Fundamentals of Painting	33
8. The Artist's Choice of Materials	38
Instruments and Techniques of Painting	
9. The Four Treasures	42
10. Chinese Calligraphy	44
Conclusions	47
Suggested Readings	48



On a Dark Autumn in a Hill Hut

*On the empty hill new rain has fallen;
Out of the dusk comes the autumn.
The bright moon shines forth between the pines,
Above the rocks flows the clear stream,
Babel in the bamboos proclaims the washing girls
are returning home,
The lotus swing beneath the fisherman's boat,
The fragrance of spring sighs and expires,
How can we detain it before it goes?*

Wang Wei

PLATE 1: Wen Po-jen, *Landscape*. 1561

Introduction

When barriers of time, distance, language, or political estrangement prevent our understanding of other peoples, a culture otherwise isolated from us may still be approached through its art. For it is through his art that man expresses his needs, his aspirations, his fears, his beliefs, his triumphs, and his failures, leaving for us in a multitude of painted, carved, and crafted images an impressive and moving record of his existence. Painting, then, is recorded history. The mountains, the secluded scholar's pavilion, rocks, trees, streams, and lakes of Chinese painting are words written in a brush stroke alphabet. Painting, however, need not be translated to be meaningful and provide us with a pleasurable experience. The painter speaks to us directly; his intent is communicated almost instantaneously. Even our first, brief encounter with a Chinese scroll leaves us with an impression, and in some way the artist, worlds apart from us, touches us with his meaning. Our interest here is not a mere confrontation with Chinese art. Rather, we seek an understanding of and appreciation for the aesthetic, philosophical, and religious values of Chinese society through the medium of painting.

The Chinese have expressed themselves over the years through several media, but painting, particularly landscape painting, has been mistress of the arts for centuries. The earliest available examples of Chinese painting date from the 200's B.C.—two fragile fragments of silk excavated from tombs at Ch'ang-sha in present-day Hunan Province. The high degree of skill and

sophistication evident in these fragments point to a tradition of painting extending even further back in time and, as yet, unknown to historians. These fragments indicate a possible beginning to the long tradition in painting, striking in its continuity. Describing these earliest surviving images, James Cahill has noted that "the pictures, drawn in fine, black ink brush-line, with flat washes of color filling the areas thus bounded, exemplify already the technique, and even something of the style that was to remain basic and orthodox for many centuries. . . . In the beginning and also in the end, the line drawn by the brush remains the central fact of Chinese painting throughout its history."

Although Chinese paintings have been known in the West for centuries, our study of Chinese art has lagged far behind our knowledge of art in other historical civilizations. Prevailing attitudes of cultural superiority, based primarily on Western predominance in science and technology, has led to indifference to the higher values of Chinese civilization. The tendency in the West has been to view Chinese painting as "exotic" or merely "different,"—attitudes which have done much to preclude the appreciation of Chinese art on the basis of its own unique superiority. Europeans and Americans who looked at the world with intellectual and scientific curiosity, simply did not understand the traditional Chinese whose aim was to come into a sympathetic and harmonious relationship with nature, to identify with mountains and lakes and, thereby, find the path to harmony and order in the world.

East and West: Contrast and Parallels

Reading one†

Ling to A. D.

In André Malraux's *Temptation of the West*, two friends, a young Frenchman and a Chinese, exchange a series of letters during the course of their travels, in which each expresses his view of the other's culture. A. D., traveling throughout China, and Ling, visiting the great cultural centers of Europe, speak each other's language and share an intense interest in art. Reflected in painting, sculpture, and architecture, A. D. and Ling see the essence of a people's culture and their view of the world around them. Ling has just visited the Louvre in Paris and, in the following excerpts from his letters, explains to his friend his thoughts as he walks through the museum.

PARIS

Cher Monsieur,

I observe Europeans; I listen to them; I don't believe they understand what life is. Their imagination must be praised for having invented the devil. But since his death, they seem to be prey to a more chaotic divinity: the intellect.

Your minds are of such a nature that they are capable of grasping only the fragmentary elements of life. You are completely carried away by the goals toward which you are incessantly aiming. You desire conquest. What do you find behind your meager victories?

We Chinese try to grasp only the entirety of life. Not that we are able to do this. Still, we know that this entirety is, and must

be, greater than any one of our individual acts. Just as, finding among ancient sketches a drawing of an arm, without knowing anything of the person whose arm it actually was, one knows that there was a hand at its end, so do we know and *feel* that beyond every act, whatever its importance, a yet hidden life extends its numberless ramifications. Life is a succession of possibilities from which we secretly desire to select and embellish a few. . . .

For a long time your race has sought to explain its existence. Carefully, you label, classify and limit other people, as well as yourselves. Armed with *pince-nez*,¹ you go along, myopic and attentive, seeking shades of difference. The care which your

1. *Pince-nez*: eyeglasses clipped to the nose by a spring.

† André Malraux, *Temptation of the West*, trans. by Robert Hollander (New York: Random House, 1961).

"We Chinese try to grasp only the entirety of life. . . ."

PLATE 2: Liang K'ai, *Li Po Chanting a Poem*.
13th century

Tokyo National Museum



sixteenth-century painters, for whom I feel some fondness, brought to their portraits — your minds have this same quality. Sometimes, when I am alone, leafing through one of the books you treasure highly, forgetting with the falling sun an anguish only too familiar these days, I take great delight in your hunt for the individual and in your efforts to hold on to such a precious captive.

We on the other hand, do not wish to be conscious of ourselves as individuals. The work of our mind is to experience lucidly our fragmentary nature and to draw from that feeling a sense of the universe, not as your pedants reconstruct prehistoric animals with a few bones, but rather as we, merely by reading a name on a post card, evoke unknown countrysides striped by giant vines; for the supreme beauty of a cultured civilization is to be found in the careful avoidance of nurturing the "I."

There is in us a capacity which you don't even realize might exist: an affinity for strange lives, lives which are basically different from our own. It so deeply impregnates our painting and sculpture that these arts are incomprehensible to someone lacking a sound understanding of this capacity. The care our painters take in observing their subjects cannot explain the forms they finally set down; for we find, in the allegorical images of gazelle and horse, for example, the same emotion that affects us in paintings in which these animals, caught in motion, seem to draw their charm from having been skillfully observed.

The vitality which penetrates our figures made you believe that our art delights in isolating the individual. Its source

lies, in fact, in the abandonment of individual characters. The idea of species is for you quite abstract; it allows you to classify; it is a means toward knowledge. In us it is closely connected with our sensibility. The arts of Asia alone have created caricatures of animals. . . . When I compare your art to our own, your sensations seem dispersed, ours almost as ordered as your ideas. Do you, a Christian, have any idea what a man can be when his sensibility is ordered?

When I say "cat" what dominates my mind is not a picture of a cat, but an impression of certain supple, silent *movements* peculiar to cats. You distinguish among species only by their outlines. Such a distinction applies only in death. (It is said that your painters used to study the proportions of the human body by sketching cadavers.)

Suggestion is the highest technical perfection in art; it is the symbol of the living as the outline is the symbol of the dead. To understand a universe of successive existences one must first understand suggestion, and it is by suggestion that the artist, in his play, discovers the universe. It marks the profound distinction between your conquest and our own: you go from obvious analogies to more obscure ones, while we proceed to irreconcilable differences.

All afternoon I've been looking at paintings in the Louvre. To that unfortunate assemblage I prefer what the windows show me! This early spring which is passing through Paris enchants me. The quays of the Seine look like lithographs by your Romantic painters: they are at once glorious, charming and bourgeois; the palaces are surrounded by men selling

"Your minds . . . are capable of grasping only the fragmentary elements of life."

PLATE 3: Diego Velázquez, *Infante Carlos*. 1625

Museo Del Prado, Madrid



birds. Your museums afford me no pleasure. The masters are closeted there; they are debating. That is not their job, nor is it ours to listen to them. And I am always depressed by those surroundings which show that you prefer the satisfaction of critical judgment to the finer joy of understanding.

Our painting, when it is beautiful, neither imitates nor depicts: it signifies. A painted bird is a particular symbol of a bird, like its character the property of those who understand it and of the painter: bird is the public sign of the reality.

Between Western and Eastern intellect I sense above all a difference of direction, almost of aim. The former desires to con-

struct a plan of the universe and give it an intelligible form; that is, to establish between the unknown and the known a relation capable of bringing to light things which have been obscure. It wants to subordinate the universe, and finds in this desire a pride that becomes greater the more intellect seems to dominate the universe. Its cosmos is a coherent myth. The Eastern mind, on the other hand, gives no value to man himself; it contrives to find, in the flow of the universe, the thoughts which permit it to break its human bonds. The first wants to bring the universe to man; the second offers man up to the universe. . . .

"Suggestion is the highest technical perfection in art . . ."

PLATE 4: Hsu Wei, *Bamboo*. 16th century

Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



China Anticipates Modern Europe

Comparing the art of China and Europe serves not only to point out interesting and fundamental contrasts between the two cultures, but also to illuminate some surprising similarities. In several instances, Chinese masters have not only produced paintings similar to European works in subject and style, but have actually anticipated the motifs of such contemporary painters as Picasso and Matisse by several hundred years. In the following excerpts from Benjamin Rowland's *Art in East and West*, we have the opportunity to compare the works of Chinese and European painters, widely separated in time and place yet seemingly a part of the same movement.

Picasso Anticipated

One of the most famous painters of the Yüan Dynasty, renowned particularly as an animalier, was the fourteenth-century master, Chao Mêng-fu (1254–1322). What is certainly one of his greatest paintings is a short handscroll in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (PLATE 6). The subject is a sheep and a goat, drawn in monochrome ink with a short explanatory note by the artist that may be translated as follows: "I often paint horses, but very seldom sheep. When Chung Shin asked me to paint, I amused myself by making a picture from life; and though I could not equal the men of old, it contains real spirit harmony." What the artist meant by saying that his creations were filled with spirit harmony (ch'i-yün)

is that he has been able to imbue these commonplace animals with the pose and movement and form that we can recognize instinctively as completely appropriate to their species: from the point of view of structure, texture, and characteristic attitude, the sheep is completely sheeplike and the goat satisfyingly goatlike. The ability to suggest an appropriate life movement or aliveness through appropriate articulation, rather than to attempt to copy outward appearance, has always been the first principle of Chinese painting. In Chao Mêng-fu's painting the animals are drawn as though capable of imminent movement. They are drawn with the greatest economy of brushstroke, a technique which, in its combination of ink wash and dry brush, suggests both texture and structure. This is a performance that is the result not only

† Benjamin Rowland, Jr., *Art in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954).

PLATE 5:
Picasso, *Ram* (aquatint).
20th century

Harvard College Library, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts



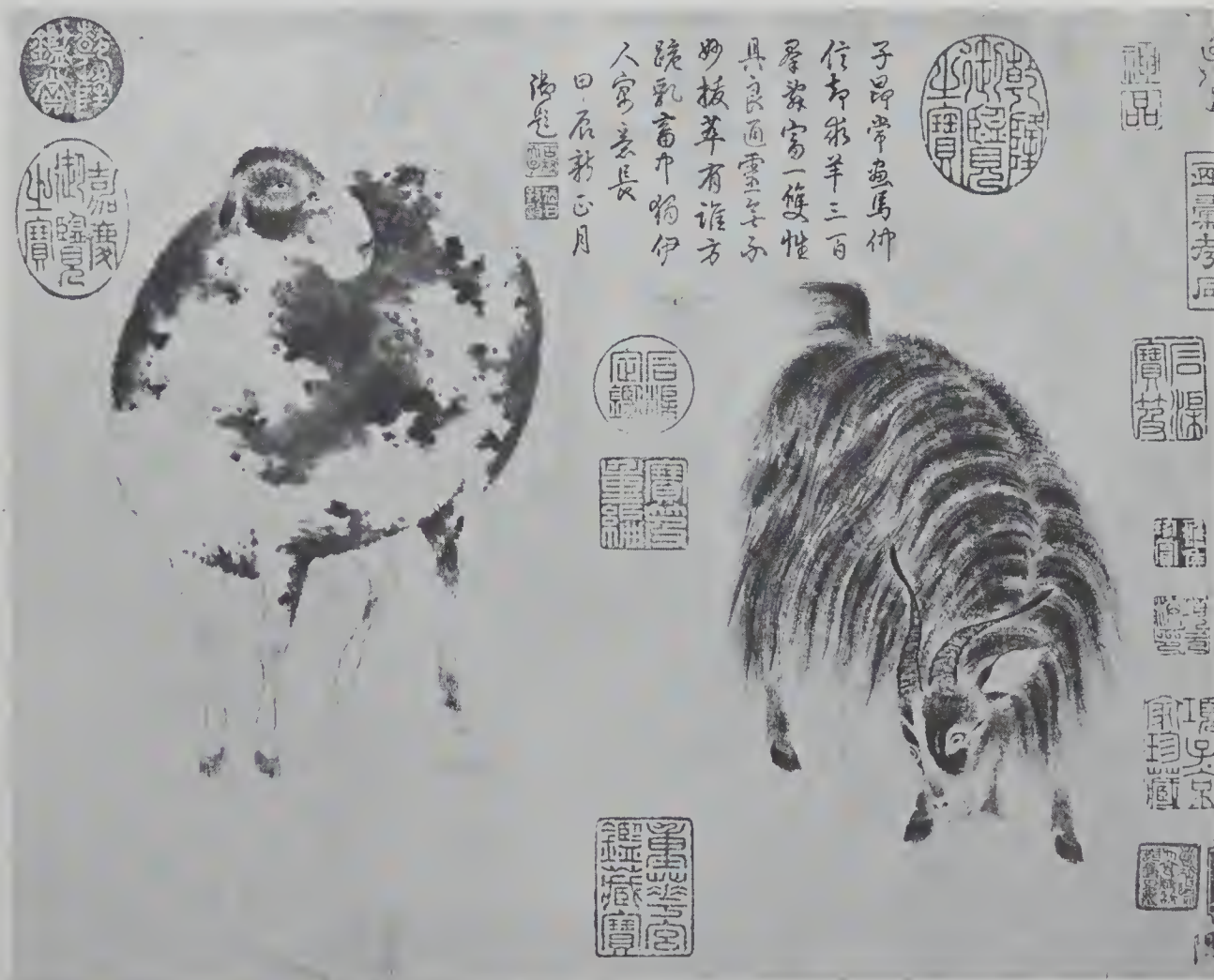
of a consummate mastery of the medium, but also of the ability of the artist to have the essentials of forms observed in nature so fixed in his mind that he can create them in painting and endow them with life.

An admirable comparison for this Oriental masterpiece is the aquatint of a ram (PLATE 5) drawn by the twentieth-century painter, Pablo Picasso. This is a presentation that an Oriental artist would understand, the perfect realization of the essential nature of the animal: the texture of its heavy fleece, the solid, virile strength

of its body. Everything that is necessary to say about a ram is there. A combination of flowing line and ink fingerprints are the Western equivalent of Chao Mêng-fu's brushwork in the perfect and economical suggestion of both texture and structure. Like the Chinese painting this is a kind of drawing that results from a complete knowledge of technique and the artist's capacity to define the essential features peculiar to a given subject—the specific qualities of articulation that endow it with the breath of life.

PLATE 6: Chao Mêng-fu, *Sheep and Goat* (ink). 14th century

Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Still Life

Matisse and a Ming Master

Just as modern painters in the West have indulged in a deliberate distortion of reality, because realism for them was associated with the academic tradition, so in Ming China some of the gentlemen-painters like Shên Chou (1427–1509) indulged in a kind of whimsical avoidance of those realistic effects of drawing and painting that for them were associated with the work of the merely professional painters. In some of his ink plays Shên Chou gives us the same kind of negation of reality that we think modern in Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Typical of this point of view is a picture dated in 1502, a still life of an orange, a chrysanthemum, and a water bottle (PLATE 7). This picture is no more than a fugitive improvisation in which we may imagine the artist was rather pleased with his deliberately bad drawing that flattens out the shapes to patterns defined in terms of the surest ink line, a line that itself arrests the eye, as does the moving contour of the Matisse drawing (PLATE 8). This sort of thing by Shên Chou might be compared with the laconic statements of the Ch'an Buddhist artists of the Sung period, who in a few lightninglike bolts and strokes created the final essence of objects in ink. This was a technique developed by the Ch'an artists to record with immediacy the instantaneous impression of a fleeting vision. Shên Chou could be described as a more modern artist and a more self-conscious one in his deliberate distortion for aesthetic effect and his realization of the independent aesthetic attraction of the slight ink and brush texture in itself. As one of his Chinese critics said,

PLATE 7: Shên Chou, *Still Life* (ink drawing).
1502

National Palace Museum,
Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China



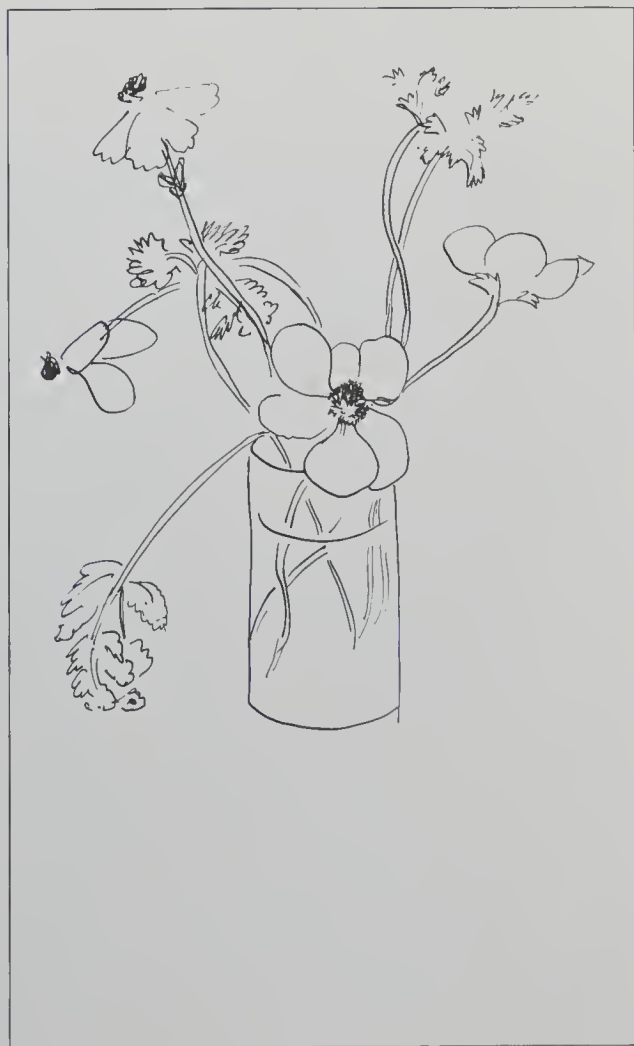
"The freer and easier, the truer were his paintings. The simpler he was, the further he reached."

There are a great many still-life drawings, like the one reproduced, from every period of Matisse's career (PLATE 8) that bear a superficial resemblance to Shên Chou's picture in their deliberate simplification and ingenuous freshness. One could say that this artist was concerned at once with the essential and aesthetic qualities of subjects, their purely formal relationships, and what might be called their personalities. Although the wit and drama of Matisse's distortions may be less conscious than they were in Shên Chou, he is interested in the emotions and associations they evoke in terms of shape and color. The aesthetic problems that have confronted Matisse as a modern artist certainly did not concern Shên Chou. For Matisse the still life has always been a struggle for the resolution of the problem of subtleties of balance, between decoration and reality, the active and static character of his forms, and the contrast of patterns and surfaces simple and complex. Matisse's experiments in the contrast of plain and ornamented surfaces, his juxtaposition of colors of high, jewel-like intensity, and his reduction of reality to pattern shapes drily inscribed in black contours, would have been totally unintelligible to the great artist of fifteenth-century China. The drawing of PLATE 8 is a complete statement of Matisse's formula in black and white. Matisse's often brilliant essays in the solution of what are really abstract problems in the balance of both form and color belong entirely to the Western world of the postimpressionist period. The resemblance to Shên Chou

rests entirely on the similarity of their reduction of objects to flat, decorative shapes in what is a sort of succinct and witty characterization of their essential forms.

PLATE 8: Matisse, *Flowers* (ink drawing).
20th century

Galerie Bernheim-Jeune



They All Look Alike to Me

This remark, commonly heard among Westerners viewing collections of Chinese painting for the first time, is the topic of the following reading by Chinese art historian Sherman E. Lee, currently director of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

While it may be true that too many art historians look with their ears, such an aberration has occasional merit. The remarks one hears in museums or at exhibitions are often amusing, and sometimes significant. That they are usually clichés does not diminish their meaning; and so when, at a Chinese Painting Exhibition I heard one beleaguered gentleman remark to his wife, “I can’t tell them apart, they all look alike to me.” I know that this was a cliché, but one worth exploring. Ever since early, near-simian man reared on his hind legs and mentally commented on the depressing similarity of his recent four-legged relations, the problem of recognizing variations among members of an out-group has been with us. And yet, how different the reactions of one of the finest of modern Dutch art historians, Dr. Van Gelder, who feelingly exclaimed after his first viewing of paintings from the Palace Collection that he would gladly begin afresh to study

painting as embodied in the marvelous early Chinese landscape school.

No one would deny that, from a Western viewpoint, Chinese painting presents a seemingly monotonous exterior. But when we have finished stating this, we become aware of the problem, for in the 20th century we have posed such questions for ourselves about the creative art of our own time. Indeed it may well be fortunate that our full exposure to the great tradition of Chinese painting waited until the 20th century, for only recently has it been more than narrowly recognized that one of the legitimate, even major, subjects of painting is nuance, the small, subtle, barely breathing variations that mean the difference between art and industry.

Thus a modern Westerner can take nourishment from Monet’s series of large canvases whose nominal subject is *Nymphaeae* (PLATES 9 and 10) but whose real subjects are nuances of transparency and translucence.

† Sherman E. Lee, “The Forest and the Trees in Chinese Painting,” *National Palace Museum Quarterly* (October, 1966).

The Cleveland Museum of Art, The John L. Severance Fund



PLATE 9: Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*. 1919–1926?

PLATE 10: Claude Monet, *Water Lilies (Les Nymphaes)*. 1925?

M. H. De Young Memorial Museum



cency, of colored pigment become colored light, of textures of nature transformed into the even more varied and subtle textures produced by the brush. Or, we take comfort in the more sombre chamber music of early cubism and accept a surface sameness of motif, so that we may concentrate on those nuances that reveal the rich dissonance of Picasso (PLATE 11) in contrast to the subtle harmonies of Braque (PLATE 12).

Even within the work of a single artist, as this century moved on, we accept "rules

of the game" strictly limiting the possibilities of variation and revel in the justness of Mondrian's seemingly inexhaustible store of invention within the confines of the accepted rectangle and primary color (PLATES 13 and 14). Obviously then, given the rules of the game, and sympathy, a Westerner really interested in art has precedents available as ground for a beginning understanding of that which makes all Chinese painting "look alike" to our earlier harried spectator.

Private Collection, New York



PLATE 11: Pablo Picasso, *Woman with Mandolin*. 1910

American Library Color Slide Company



PLATE 12: Georges Braque, *Woman with Guitar*. 1913

Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremoine Collection

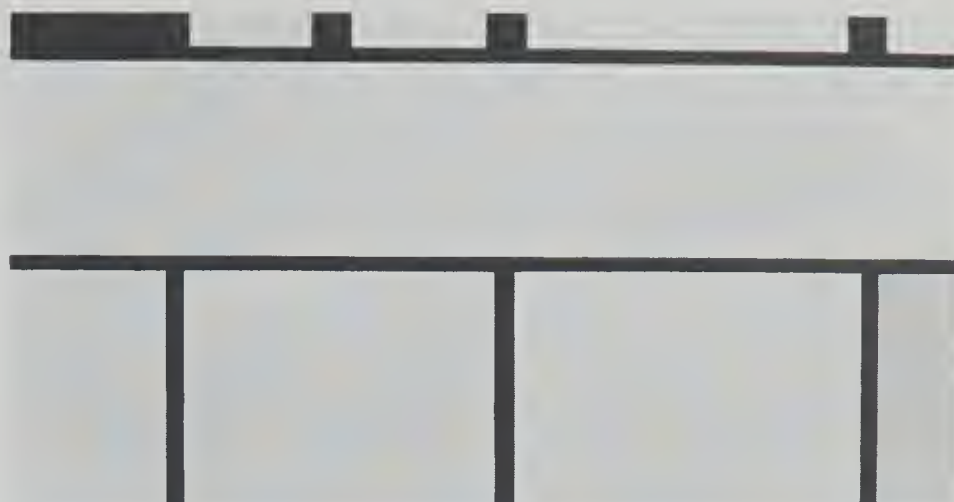


PLATE 13: Piet Mondrian, *Composition*. 1935–1942

PLATE 14: Piet Mondrian, *Composition 2*. 1922

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

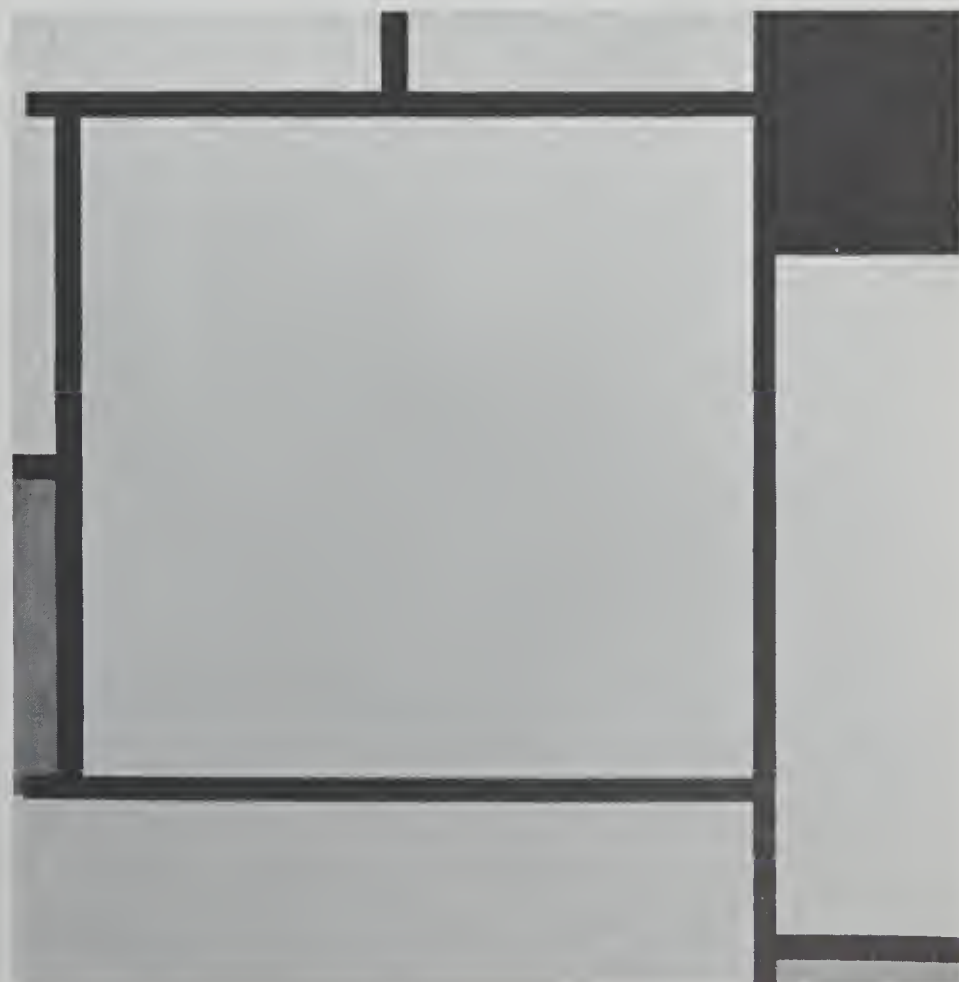




PLATE 15: Hung-jen, *Rivers and Mountains without End*. 1661

"The great unifying aim has been to express Tao, the Way—the basic Chinese belief in an order and harmony in nature. . . ."

The Way of Painting

Reading four†

On Tao and the Tao

This following article begins our inquiry into the nature of certain ideas and cultural factors that have motivated and guided the course of Chinese painting. Looking at a picture is more than a visual experience, for while this is satisfying, it is the total experience of viewing we seek here. The total experience includes perceiving and understanding those aspects of the painting which reflect the artist's view of life, the direction of his meditation and thought, his imagination, and the basic tenets of his culture. To help us in attaining this goal, Sze Mai-mai describes the fundamental idea which gives Chinese landscape painting its meaning, substance, quality and direction.

In the vast literature of Chinese painting, there is continual reference to a *tao* or “way.” It is not a personal way, nor the mannerisms of a school. It is the traditional Chinese *tao*. As one among several ways, one dialect in the universal language of painting, this *tao* is distinctive for certain fundamental concepts and for the manner in which they have long been represented by the Chinese brush and ink. The great unifying aim has been to express *Tao*, the Way—the basic Chinese belief in an order and harmony in nature. This grand concept originated in remote times, from observation of the heavens and of nature—the rising and setting of sun, moon, and stars, the cycle of day and night, and the rotation of the seasons—suggesting the existence of laws of nature, a sort of divine

legislation that regulated the pattern in the heavens and its counterpart on earth.

Among the schools of Chinese thought *Tao* has been described by many names; for these there are no exact translations. *Tao* has always evoked feelings of deep reverence, the more profound because of its inscrutable nature. The *Chuang Tzū* observes that “*Tao* cannot be conveyed by either words or silence. In that state which is neither speech nor silence its transcendental nature may be apprehended.” Painting might be described as a manifestation of “that state which is neither speech nor silence,” and Chinese painting, at its best, with its swift brushstrokes and wonderful power of suggestion, was a particularly effective means of communicating aspects of the *Tao*. To express *Tao*, a

†Sze Mai-mai, *The Tao of Painting*, Vol. I (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956).

pattern or "way" of training and discipline was established that made specific demands of the painter in scholarship and character, besides technical skill. Knowledge of this *tao* of painting being indispensable, Chinese painters and art critics have always in the past found the topic of absorbing interest, and the records are filled with their comments on it. Characteristically, their essays on the *tao* of and the *Tao* in painting were largely quotation and paraphrase of earlier writings. Their comments, displaying occasional flashes of intuition, scrutinized and sought to clarify the various definitions. Originality of interpretation was never applauded; it was neither expected nor encouraged, for intellectual comprehension of the *Tao* was regarded as merely a step toward the complete attunement necessary for successful results. And throughout the course of Chinese painting the common purpose has been to reaffirm the traditional *tao* and to transmit the ideas, principles, and methods that have been tested and developed by the masters of each period as the means of expressing the harmony of the *Tao*.

The process of transmission was not as rigid as it might seem. The Chinese tradition, ancient and deeply respected, has given the impression of being massive and fixed. It has a monumental aspect but its prime characteristic is adaptability. It is not inflexible, or it could never have survived. Over long centuries, there obviously were many changes and inevitably the outlook of each generation has differed, slight as the differences may seem to us today. In painting, particularly, the factor of personality was considerable: the influence of dominant painters and critics in each period

effected changes in various aspects of the traditional *tao*; and, in actual practice, the ink and the soft Chinese brush being extraordinarily sensitive, the personal touch could not fail to be revealed in each brushstroke. Each generation might, therefore, be said to have used the tradition in its own way, modifying it to suit its needs.

Training in brushwork and in the symbolism embodying the ancient beliefs and concepts was part of the traditional education of a scholar. Up to modern times, this discipline consisted of the reading, memorizing, and study of the classics of history, religion, and philosophy; in the process, one learned as a matter of course to write. The preliminary steps required many diligent years and account for two important features of Chinese painting. The first is the close relationship between painting and calligraphy: in both arts the same soft, pointed brush is used, with a consequent emphasis on high standards of brushwork. The second feature is the traditional view that painting is not a profession but an extension of the art of living, for the practice of the *tao* of painting is part of the traditional *tao* of conduct and thought, of living in harmony with the laws of *Tao*. Under such circumstances, Chinese painting has usually been an expression of maturity: most of the great masters first distinguished themselves as officials, scholars, or poets, and many were expert calligraphers, before they turned to painting. Some, though they painted, preferred to exhibit their brush skill in calligraphy; some excelled in painting as well as in other fields—for example, Chang Hêng, astronomer and poet, was a painter of repute; Wang Wei (*tzū* Ching-hsien), calligrapher, musician, and medical man,

painted and moreover wrote one of the most perceptive essays in the literature of Chinese painting; and the famous Su Tung-p'o, a rare and genial personality, was eminently successful as official, scholar, poet, art critic, calligrapher, and painter of bamboo.

In acquiring the education prescribed by the *tao* of painting, a painter underwent rigorous intellectual discipline and intensive training of memory. He acquired a store of knowledge crowned by the essence of Chinese thought—the ideals and ideas of painting comprehensible to all who had the same training as well as to all whose education came through custom and hearsay. The ancient wisdom molded his character and nourished his innermost resources. In writing with brush and ink, he acquired sensitivity and control of the medium, and, because of the nature of Chinese writing, the finest training of hand and eye. Writing Chinese characters also developed a fine sense of proportion, which, in painting, was evident in the arrangement of a composition and its details, in drawing with the brush, and, more subtly, in the exercise of taste and discrimination. Such a sense is a form of that sense of fitness, so prominent in every aspect of Chinese life, which Confucius rated one of the Five Cardinal Virtues. He used the ancient term *li*, generally translated “ritual,” although its significance lay rather in the motives and ideas underlying ritual. Essentially, the sense of fitness is knowing what to do and how to do it, suitable to the occasion, with the implication that, in performing a rite or behaving ceremoniously, one understands the meaning and purpose of the ritual approach.

Painting and every other phase of Chi-

nese life continued to be governed by the value of the ritual approach. It is worth noting, therefore, that the original purpose of ritual was to order the life of the community in harmony with the forces of nature (*Tao*), on which subsistence and well-being depended. It was not only pious but expedient to perform regularly and properly the rituals of worship, propitiation, and celebration. These were acts of reverence. They were also literally attempts to bring heaven down to earth, for they were patterned on the rhythmic transformations in the skies and in nature, in the hope that a like order and harmony might prevail in society. Men had observed that there is a dignity, an eminent propriety, in that pattern, and they firmly believed it beneficial to emulate it and thereby acquire a like dignity, grace, and harmony. Hence the conviction that individuals and society are better off when they have some signposts of belief and ritual and moral conduct. Painting began in the service of religious ritual and custom: the careful decorating and “making sacred” of ceremonial vessels and implements with celestial patterns and symbols of the sun, moon, stars. And even when, in subsequent periods, the function of painting was enlarged beyond the religious, it continued to express the harmony of the *Tao* as reflected in nature on earth. In other words, painting, like every other activity in Chinese life, retained most of its character as an act of reverence long after its original motivations had become obscure. The concept of the *Tao*, the ideal of conduct and thought expressive of the *Tao*, continued to be of fundamental importance, governing technique, theory, and the approach of the painter.

The Painter Views Nature

The Chinese painter sees himself set into a world of beauty, beckoning him to enter, to explore, to touch, and to capture its meaning. We have seen in previous readings that there is a difference of direction and objective between Chinese and European painters, a difference which reflects contrasting elements in their respective societies. The landscape painting enables us to probe further into these fundamental differences and develop some understanding not only of painting but Chinese and European views of life and nature. In this reading, art historian Michael Sullivan describes traditional Chinese attitudes toward nature, the artist's view of landforms, and the purposes served by this particular art form.

To the Chinese all mountains are sacred, hallowed by a tradition that goes back centuries before the Buddhists and Taoists built their first temples on the hillsides. They are sacred because, since remote times, the Chinese have held that the cosmic forces, the energy, harmony, and ceaseless renewal of the universe, are in some way made manifest in them. In popular belief the mountain is the body of the cosmic being, the rocks its bones, the water the blood that gushes through its veins, the trees and grasses its hair, the clouds and mists the vapor of its breath—the cosmic breath (*ch'i*), or cloud-breath (*yün-ch'i*), which is the visible manifestation of the very essence of life. Perhaps the peasant making his occasional pilgrimage to the

temple on its summit is only dimly aware of the power of the mountain. For him it is enough to sense the magic in the air and to feel, almost without knowing it, that for a short time he has come closer to the mysterious heart of nature. To the Chinese poet, painter, or philosopher, however, to wander in the mountains is an act of meditation, even of adoration. In the procession of the seasons, the rhythm of rain and sun, the endless movement of clouds, mist, and water, he sees a manifestation of the rhythm of the universe itself. By climbing the hills and looking out over range upon range of peaks he discovers man's true place in the scheme of things. When the sun first strikes the high, bare eastern slopes at dawn, while the

[†]Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).



National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China

PLATE 16: Huang Kung-wang, *Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains*. 1350

"Bridles and fetters in the din of the world are always repugnant to human nature, while Sages and Immortals in haze and mist are what human nature yearns for but cannot reach."

cloud-filled hollows lie dark and hidden, he observes the workings of the cosmic dualism of *yang* and *yin*, which, forever interacting yet forever held in balance, set in motion the due process of nature.

India, with her extremes of drought and rain, death and rebirth, tends to seek release from the harshness of the physical world in philosophical abstraction, and, if release from the burden of existence cannot be found, to invest the physical act with a metaphysical meaning. Indian thought thus inclines toward the transcendental. The Chinese, living in a kinder environment, tend to seek Reality not in philosophical speculation but in the natural

world. To know nature more intimately, therefore, is to come closer to an understanding of the Reality which is immanent in nature.

The Chinese painter may spend years in wandering among the hills and streams so that this natural order, which is but a visible manifestation of the cosmic order, may reveal itself to him. But how can he express the intensity of the awareness that comes to him in these moments of spiritual revelation before the ultimate mysteries of the universe? The language of metaphysics is too remote, too abstract, to convey an experience that, while partly psychic, is also intensely visual. For the

wanderer in the mountains attains awareness through no mere feat of the imagination, but through a journey, in space and time, in a real landscape. Bare rock and green foliage, heat and cold, light and shadow, sound and silence—these belong not to the world of the philosophers and metaphysicians but to a world in which visual and psychic experiences are inextricably interwoven. Such experiences can find expression only in a language that is both visual and abstract—visual enough so that the forms that gave rise to it may be apprehended, conveyed, and recognized for what they are, yet abstract enough to confer upon the forms thus created the validity of a general, eternal truth.

In the art of landscape painting the Chinese have evolved a language of visual symbols which, in fulfilling these conditions, is one of the great achievements not only of the Chinese genius but of the human imagination.

Fundamental to any understanding of Chinese culture is the fact that the Chinese are an agricultural people, and have been so since remote antiquity. To belong to a family with a tradition of studying and farming was something to be proud of. Rooted in the soil, aware above all of the recurring pattern of the year, of rain and drought, winter and summer, the Chinese developed an instinctive sense of an endless rhythm, an endless series of variations on the simple theme of the seasons. From earliest times they accepted this rhythm and submitted to it, for they knew that survival and prosperity depended upon their acceptance. Submission to the rhythm of the world as he finds it is the mark of the farmer and gardener, the

source of his serenity. The illiterate rustic could scarcely have formulated a philosophy of nature; that was left to the scholars, poets, and painters, who in art and literature found expression for a truth which all instinctively recognized. Their aim was not, like ours in the West, to re-create, to construct, or design the world, but rather to discover, by intuition, what the design actually is. The vast and elaborate ritual established under the Chou Dynasty had as its basic purpose the necessity of making manifest the fact that man had apprehended this grand design—the Will of Heaven—and was acting in accordance with it.

The evolution of the Chinese world view has been influenced also by her geographical position. Protected on two sides by sea, on a third by impenetrable mountain ranges, and on the fourth by deserts, China has remained inviolate for long stretches of time, falling prey to invasions across her northern frontiers only when the government was weak. This isolation has given her security, a sense of permanence and attachment to the land. The Chinese have always been receptive to foreign ideas, often uncritically so; but because these borrowed ideas and artistic forms had traveled immense distances from their source, across mountains and deserts, the Chinese were often able to put them to their own use without becoming subject to the cultures that had produced them. We shall find again and again that landscape painting from the Han Dynasty onward made use of subjects and motifs imported from India or the Near East, but these are everywhere controlled and transformed by a uniquely Chinese attitude toward nature.

Comments on Landscape

For centuries Chinese masters have studied the *Essay on Landscape Painting* by Kuo Hsi (1020–1090), who is considered by his contemporaries to be the greatest painter of his day. Extremely influential in shaping the course of Chinese and Japanese painting, the *Essay* is actually a collection of the master's sayings compiled by his son Kuo Ssu and consists of four parts: Comments on Landscape and Ideas and Motifs of Painting, from which this reading is taken; Secrets of Painting; Supplement to the Rules of Painting; and Talks about Painting. In the selection which follows, the Sung dynasty master explains the Chinese interest in landscape painting and the artist's approach to his subject.

Why do superior men love landscape, what is the reason for it? Hills and gardens are the constant dwelling-places for one who seeks to cultivate his original nature; springs and rocks are the constant joy for the whistling rambler; fishing and wood-gathering are the constant occupations for the hermit and the recluse; the ape and the crane are constantly viewed by those who want to fly and to call. Bridles and fetters in the din of the world are always repugnant to human nature, while Sages and Immortals in haze and mist are what human nature yearns for but cannot reach.

In times of peace and glory the two authorities are those of the prince and the parents, and if they are pure, purity and virtue will rule in public and private life. With such bonds, how could the perfect

man retire on high, break away from the customs of the common world and be as immaculate as Mount Chi and the River P'in. The Ode of the White Colt and the Song of the Purple Fungus are gone forever, yet the wish for forests and springs, the companionship of the mists and vapours remains in his dreams. The ears and the eyes perceive them no more, but when grasped by a master hand, they are revealed again, and it is possible to enjoy, without stepping out of the house or leaving the sitting-mat, streams and valleys. The cries of apes and the songs of birds seem to reach the ear again, while the luminous mountains and the colour of the far expanding waters attract the eyes. Is it not "to please the mind of another and really (thereby) attain my own wish"?

† Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*, Vol. I: *Early Chinese Painting* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1956).



PLATE 17: Kuo Hsi, *Early Spring*. 1072

"He should go himself to the mountains and streams in order to grasp them; then their aspects and meaning will become clear to him."

That is why the fundamental idea of landscape painting is so highly appreciated in the world. But if this is not realized and the landscapes are looked at in a light-hearted way, is it not like blurring a divine spectacle and defiling the pure wind?

There are various kinds of landscape paintings, some are spread out into large compositions, in which there is not a thing too much; others are condensed into quite small views in which, however, nothing is left out. There are also different ways of looking at landscapes; if one looks at them with the heart of the woods and the streams, their value becomes great, but if one looks at them with proud and haughty eyes, their value becomes quite low.

Landscapes are large things; he who contemplates them should be at some distance; only so is it possible for him to behold in one view all the shapes and atmospheric effects of mountains and streams. As to paintings of men and women, executed with a fine brush, they can be unrolled in the hand or on a small table, and thus in one glance be completely seen and examined. These are all different manners of painting.

It has been truly said that among landscapes there are those fit to walk through, those fit to contemplate, those fit to ramble in, and those fit to live in. When a picture reaches one of these standards it enters the class of the wonderful, but those fit to walk through or to contemplate are not equal to those fit to ramble in or to live in. Why is it so? Look at the landscapes of today. They comprise distances of several hundred *li*,¹ but not three or four tenths of the space are fit to idle or dwell in. Yet, they

are accepted as of the class of pictures fit to idle or dwell in. But the yearning of the noble man for woods and streams is aroused by the existence of such beautiful places. Therefore painters must keep this idea in mind and beholders should examine pictures according to the same.

He who is learning to paint flowers takes a stalk of the flower, places it in a deep hole in the ground and examines it from above; in this way the flower may be (completely) grasped from the four sides. He who learns to paint bamboos places a stalk of bamboo in the clear moonlight, so that its shadow falls on a white wall; in this way the real shape of the bamboo comes out. He who learns to paint landscapes should not do it differently. He should go himself to the mountains and streams in order to grasp them; then their aspects and meaning will become clear to him. The effect of real streams and valleys is comprehended at a distance; when seen close by (only) their component elements are grasped.

Contemplation of such pictures evokes in men corresponding ideas. It is as if one really were among the mountains, and such is the intention beyond the depicted scenery. Seeing the blue haze and the white paths, one feels like walking. Seeing the quiet streams and the setting sun, one feels like stopping in contemplation. When one looks at lonely men living in the mountains, one feels like staying there. When one sees the cliffs, the streams and the stones, one feels like rambling among them. The contemplation of such pictures arouses corresponding feelings in the heart; it is as if one really came to those places. That is the unexpected marvel of such pictures.

1. Approximately one-sixth of mile.

Those who nowadays wield the brush do not go in for a broad preparation; they do not make sufficiently clear and thorough observations, their practice does not go very far, and they do not grasp the essential features. Yet, when they get hold of a piece of paper or a bit of wall, they at once wave the brush and let the ink flow. How could they then gather the scenery with its mist and clouds and convey the message of the streams and the mountains?

Mountains are big things; their shapes may be high and lofty, proud and arrogant, dignified and generous; they may be as if seated with legs spread out or with legs crossed. They may be massive and thick, bold and brave; they may reveal a living spirit; and be majestic and strong. They may be as if looking around or bowing in salutation. They may have a cover on the top and a pedestal beneath, a support in front and something to lean on at the back. They may be looking down as if observing something, or as if marching along and giving directions. Such are the aspects and the grandeur of the mountains.

The watercourses are the arteries of the mountains, grass and trees are their hair; mist and clouds give them their air of beauty. Therefore mountains must have waters to be alive, grass and trees to be beautiful, mist and clouds to be fine and alluring.

Water has the mountains as its face, pavilions and kiosks as its eyes and eyebrows, angling and fishing to give it animation. Therefore, when there is a moun-

tain, water looks attractive; when there are pavilions and kiosks, it looks bright and pleasant, with fishing and angling, it looks wide and great. Such are the configurations of mountains and water.

Rocks form the bones of heaven and earth. They are precious and should be buried deep in the earth and not be disclosed on the surface. Water is the blood of heaven and earth; blood is precious and should circulate and not be frozen or obstructed.

Ideals or Motifs for Painting

Men of the world think that pictures are made simply by moving the brush; they do not understand that painting is no easy matter.

But if I do not dwell in perfect harmony and am not seated peacefully at a bright window before a clean table burning a stick of incense to dispel all anxieties, fine verses and excellent ideas do not take shape; the inner mood and beauty of their meaning is not realized in my thoughts. How can it then be said that the principal thing in painting is easily reached?

Only when circumstances are ripe and the heart and hand responsive, will the horizontal and vertical strokes be true to measure, and (I seize the principles) on either hand, meeting everywhere with them like a fountain (from which they flow). Then the people of the world will be moved and enabled to roughly grasp my intentions.

The Language of Painting

Reading seven†

Fundamentals of Painting

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century three painters worked together to complete the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, later to become the most widely used handbook of painting in China. The Manual, which received its poetic title from the name of the publisher's home, consists of a text describing the basic steps of water-ink painting and presenting a detailed statement on the discipline and techniques required of the master painter. In addition to this text are thirteen "books" of woodcuts and commentary, illustrating the general principles of painting typical elements in a Chinese painting such as trees, rocks, the orchid, the plum, bamboo, people, and animals. Included in this reading are excerpts from the introductory essay and reproductions of pages from a few of the books of instruction.

Discussion of the Fundamentals of Painting

Lu Ch'ai says:

Among those who study painting, some strive for an elaborate effect and others prefer the simple. Neither complexity in itself nor simplicity is enough.

Some aim to be deft, others to be laboriously careful. Neither dexterity nor conscientiousness is enough.

Some set great value on method while others pride themselves on dispensing with method. To be without method is deplorable, but to depend entirely on method is worse.

You must learn first to observe the rules faithfully; afterwards, modify them according to your intelligence and capacity. The end of all method is to seem to have no method.

Among the masters, it was a different matter. Ku Ch'ang-k'ang applied his colors sprinkling and splashing, and the grass and flowers seemed to grow at the movement of his hand. Han Kan, whose picture *The Yellow Horse* was unique, used to pray before he painted, and his brush was inspired. At a later stage, therefore, one may choose either to proceed methodically or to paint seemingly without method.

†Sze Mai-mai, *The Tao of Painting*, Vol. II: *The Chieh Tzu Yuan Hua Chuan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956).



Book of the Chrysanthemum



Book of Trees

First, however, you must work hard. Bury the brush again and again in the ink and grind the inkstone to dust. Take ten days to paint a stream and five to paint a rock. Then, later, you may try to paint the landscape at Chialing. Li Ssū-hsün took months to paint it; Wu Tao-tzū did it in one evening. Thus, at a later stage, one may proceed slowly and carefully or one may rely on dexterity.

First, however, learn to hold in your thoughts the Five Peaks. Do not concentrate on the whole ox. Study ten thousand volumes and walk ten thousand miles. Follow Ni Yün-lin painting in the style of Yu Ch'êng: when he painted, mountains soared and springs flowed, waters ran clear and forests spread vast and lonely. Be like Kuo Shu-hsien, who with one stroke of the brush released a kite on a hundred-foot string, who painted with equal facility the large and the small—towers and many-storied buildings as easily as the hair of oxen and the thread of a silkworm. Thus, at a later stage, an elaborate effect is acceptable and a simple one is equally acceptable.

If you aim to dispense with method, learn method. If you aim at facility, work hard. If you aim for simplicity, master complexity.

Finally, there are the Six Canons, the Six Essentials, the Six Qualities, the Three Faults, and the Twelve Things to Avoid. How can one disregard them?

Illustrations from
Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting

*Notes on Eighteen Basic Principles,
Standards and Rules*

THE SIX CANONS (*Lu Fa*)

In the Southern Ch'i period (479-501), Hsieh Ho said:

Circulation of the *Ch'i* (Breath, Spirit, Vital Force of Heaven) produces movement of life.

Brush creates structure.

According to the object draw its form.
According to the nature of the object apply color.

Organize composition with the elements in their proper places.

In copying, seek to pass on the essence of the master's brush and methods. (Lu Ch'ai, citing one school of thought, adds:)

All but the First Canon can be learned and practiced to the point of true accomplishment. (As for the ability to make manifest aspects of the) *Ch'i* in its constant revolving and mutation, one has to be born with that gift.

THE SIX ESSENTIALS (*Lu Yao*) AND THE SIX QUALITIES (*Lu Ch'ang*)

In the Sung period, Liu Tao-ch'un said:

First Essential: Action of the *Ch'i* and powerful brushwork go together.

Second Essential: Basic design should be according to tradition.

Third Essential: Originality should not disregard the *li* (the principles or essence) of things.

Fourth Essential: Color (if used) should enrich.

Fifth Essential: The brush should be handled with *tzū jan* (spontaneity).

Sixth Essential: Learn from the masters but avoid their faults.



Book of People and Things



Book of Rocks



PLATE 18: Shên Chou,
*Walking with a staff in the Manner
of Ni Tsan*. 16th century

First Quality: To display brushstroke power with good brushwork control.

Second Quality: To possess sturdy simplicity with refinement of true talent.

Third Quality: To possess delicacy of skill with vigor of execution.

Fourth Quality: To exhibit originality, even to the point of eccentricity, without violating the *li* of things.

Fifth Quality: In rendering space by leaving the silk or paper untouched, to be able nevertheless to convey nuances of tone.

Sixth Quality: On the flatness of the picture plane, to achieve depth and space.

THE THREE FAULTS (*San Ping*)

In the Sung period, Kuo Jo-hsü said:

The Three Faults all are connected with the handling of the brush.

The first is described as “boardlike” (*p'an*), referring to the stiffness of a weak wrist and a sluggish brush. Shapes of objects become flat and thin, lacking in solidity.

The second is described as “carving” (*k'o*) referring to the labored movement of the brush caused by hesitation. Heart and hand are not in accord. In drawing, the brush is awkward.

The third is described as “knotted” (*chieh*), referring to the knotted effect when the brush seems to be tied, or in some way hindered from moving freely, and lacks pliancy.

THE TWELVE THINGS TO AVOID (*Shih Êrh Chi*)

In the Yüan period, Jao Tzŭ-jan said:

The first thing to avoid is a crowded, ill-arranged composition.

The second, far and near not clearly distinguished.

The third, mountains without *Ch'i*, the pulse of life.

The fourth, water with no indication of its source.

The fifth, scenes lacking any places made inaccessible by nature.

The sixth, paths with no indication of beginning and end.

The seventh, stones and rocks with one face.

The eighth, trees with less than four main branches.

The ninth, figures unnaturally distorted.

The tenth, buildings and pavilions inappropriately placed.

The eleventh, atmospheric effects of mist and clearness neglected.

The twelfth, color applied without method.

THE THREE CLASSES (*San P'in*)

Hsia Wên-yen said:

Ch'i yün shêng tung (circulation of the *Ch'i* produces the movement of life) is a principle of Heaven. When it is operating through the painter, the effect in his picture is beyond definition, and the painter may be said to belong in the *shên* (divine) class.

When brushwork is of a high order, colors appropriate, and expression clear and harmonious, the painter may be placed in the *miao* (marvelous and profound) class.

When form is realized and the rules have been applied, the painter is of the *nêng* (able and accomplished) class.



PLATE 19: Ni Tsan,
Trees in a River Valley at Yu-Shan. 1371

The Artist's Choice of Materials

The Western observer quickly notices many conspicuous and unique aspects of Chinese paintings not found in his own art—the writing, or inscriptions, that appear on many paintings, the striking red marks, or seals, which often cover the entire composition; the long format of the hand scroll and hanging scroll; and others. These elements of the painting, significant in themselves, are the subject of this article.

The unique character of Chinese painting developed as a result of the materials used and the kind of format evolved in ancient times. Painting on silk or on paper calls for fluid ink and water-colour pigments, which alone are suitable to these light and absorbent materials. Conversely, the distinctive materials and forms were retained over many centuries and developed by artists because these means alone produced the aesthetic qualities which the Chinese most admired.

The earliest paintings now known, fragments from the fifth to the third century B.C. recovered at Ch'ang-sha in Hunan, are done in ink and light colour on silk. For a long time following the invention of paper, traditionally in A.D. 105, silk continued in favour for paintings and good calligraphy. After paper came into more general use as a ground for painting, the

choice between the two materials was a matter of the artist's personal inclination.

Of greatest importance is the ink in both calligraphy and painting. It is made from pine soot and glue mixed into a paste which is formed into sticks or cakes of various shapes by allowing it to dry in moulds carrying carved designs and inscriptions. The best ink sticks are frequently minor works of art in themselves. The ink is prepared by rubbing or grinding the hard stick, in combination with water, on an ink-slab, the earliest of which were made of metal and later of pottery or special kinds of stone. This remarkable material will produce a pure, lustrous black and, when diluted with water, a full range of values up to the palest, mistlike grey.

A vital factor in determining the nature of Chinese painting is the extraordinary character and variety of brushes which

† Laurence Sickman, ed., *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting in the Collection of John M. Crawford, Jr.* (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1962).



Showing a Painting to a Friend (woodcut). 19th cent.



Lady Painting Bamboo (woodcut). 19th cent.

have been perfected over the centuries.

The brush tip, composed from the hairs of rabbit, goat, fox, wolf, and other animals, is made in two parts: a core, or 'kernel,' and an outer layer or mantle in one or more layers, one of which has longer hairs than the core and thus forms the pliant point. All brushes are one of two types, either the *shui-pi*, 'water brush,' or the *kan-pi*, 'dry brush.' The former is more absorbent of ink and has a soft, highly pliant point; the latter, because it has a stiffened core, absorbs less ink and its tip is less yielding. The soft-pointed brush is used for flowing, modulated strokes or delicate lines of even width, while the stiff-pointed brush is employed for a more bold, rugged, and 'calligraphic' line. The Chinese brush is the most sensitive and richly potential instrument for painting yet devised.

From the nature of the materials, absorbent paper or silk, ink and water-colour pigments, it will be readily understood that the brushstroke once committed is unalterable. To be successful, the artist who paints in this way must have a lucid visual memory and a perfectly fluent unhesi-

tating technique. From beginning to end, from side to side and top to bottom, the brushwork must be consistent. The individual character of the painter's brushwork, which is the expression of his qualities as a man, must be unfaltering and sustained. No second thoughts, corrections or smudging-over are possible.

For additional modelling and to unite the textural brush strokes, light washes are applied over them. In later paintings, especially of the Ming dynasty, these washes may be in pale, transparent colours, generally a subtle play between warm and cool shades, such as pale umber and light green. At times the wash, called *jan*, is used almost alone, with very little of the inner texturing strokes, as in the Kuo Hsi landscape.

All the elements of nature—trees, waterfalls, clouds, mist, lakes, and streams—have been studied with the view of extracting their essence and translating this into terms of brush and ink. These methods eventually became stereotyped, and were grouped and classified into what March has called the 'type forms.' He has well described them as the 'evidence of essential

reality distilled through centuries of observation of transient effects.'

Although it was not until relatively late, the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries—the time of the well-known *Painting Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*—that the type forms became so highly codified, something of the kind had existed for a very long time and must be attributed to the Chinese respect for, and faith in, the accomplishments of the past. Even though the aim was to perpetuate the spirit of the old masters more than their outward form, devotion to tradition led to the retention of styles for centuries.

Chinese painting is as distinct in its forms as in techniques. This is especially true of the handscroll. The long, horizontal scroll, which is unrolled from the right toward the left, is the oldest form; the vertical hanging scroll and the album leaves are considerably later in their evolution. The handscroll is never shown throughout its whole length, nor is it displayed in a room as decoration. It is pre-eminently art for an occasion. Handscrolls are kept put away, often in brocade wrappers and suitable boxes. At the proper occasion, determined by the mood of the owner or the company present, the scrolls are brought out to be unrolled on desk or table, never more than two feet or so at a time, and enjoyed as a progression while the painting is revealed foot by foot. The Far Eastern handscroll, and this form alone in the world, introduces a progression through time into the art of painting. It is a kind of visual narrative, in which the dramatic possibilities are limitless. Chinese artists have exploited the potentials of this long, horizontal composition with sensitivity and skill.

The mounting of the handscroll presents a number of features of considerable interest. Paintings done on thin silk or paper must be reinforced with a sturdy backing; the edges must be protected by borders; and since, unlike occidental pictures, Chinese paintings are not intended to be looked at in perpetuity, means must be provided for rolling them up so they may be stored away. Mounting methods follow century-old traditions, and good painting mounters are celebrated in the literature of Chinese art.

After critical judgment, based on a knowledge of 'brush and ink,' has determined that a given painting is a good painting, there are three main additional factors to consider: the inscription on the painting, or accompanying it, the seals impressed upon it and its mountings, and the recordings of the picture in the special literature.

The inscriptions accompanying a painting are of two kinds, the superscripts, which are written on the painting or title sheet preceding the picture, and the colophons, which are confined to the sheets of paper at the end of a handscroll. On hanging scrolls these latter may be written on a sheet provided for the purpose, just above the painting or on the mounting. Many of the inscriptions written on the surface of the painting are done by the artist himself. The most common of these, of course, is the artist's signature. His signature may be preceded by the place name of his home; it may also be accompanied by a date or a brief dedication.

At the end of the scroll occur the colophons, *pa*, written on the long sheet of paper provided, or on separate sheets of paper which have been united with the

scroll during subsequent remountings. Colophons may be written by the owner of the scroll, by friends to whom he has shown it, or by recognized experts from whom the owner has requested an expertise or 'certificate.' The contents of these colophons enjoy the widest latitude—from biographical information about the artist, or an analysis of the painting and notes about its history, to poems inspired by the picture or vague jottings that could, in fact, go with any picture as well as the one to which they are attached. Some of the latter type are written as examples of beautiful calligraphy, using the painting only as an excuse.

The second factor to be considered in an examination of Chinese calligraphies and paintings is the seals impressed on them. Although the seals are often less important than the superscripts and colophons as an aid in forming a judgment, they are a subject of intense interest.

The collectors' seals, with which we are principally concerned here, carry a wide variety of legends. They may be the owner's regular name or one or another of his sobriquets, the name of the studio or library where his paintings and writings were kept, or they may bear a legend referring to some particular circumstance connected with his collection.

The placing of a seal on the painting or its mountings should be done with care and an eye to the composition as a whole. Most collectors have employed their seals sparingly and with taste. On a handscroll a collector will impress a seal over the juncture of sheets of paper or where the painting and colophons abut the damask of the mounting, to show that the sequence of elements has not been changed and also as

a guide for later remounting. Large imperial seals or those of princely owners were placed at the top, and no collector would impress his seal above them, nor would he, if possible, ever place his seal above that of the artist.

The value to be placed on a collector's seal is in direct relation to his reputation as a man of discernment and knowledge. There are many who deserve deep respect. Of the Yüan dynasty, the seal of Chao Mêng-fu, the great painter, calligrapher, and statesman, occurs on pictures of high quality.

It was not uncommon for collectors to compile catalogues of their collections, and these form the third category of factors bearing on the history of a painting. Among the best catalogues of a single collection is the *Moyüan hui-kuan* by An Ch'i, completed in 1742, in which he gives a most minute description of each entry, not only the size and materials, but also the composition, the seals, whether they are in red or white legends, and information concerning inscriptions.

Much, if not all, of the above must seem to the Western reader to be secondary and marginal to the theme of the nature of Chinese painting. To the Chinese connoisseur, on the other hand, all varied elements reinforce one another to create a unity of beauty. For him the aesthetic quality of the painting or writing is enhanced by handsomely designed, well-placed seals, by the allusions of the poetry inscribed by the artist or his friends, by any accomplished calligraphy that may appear among the colophons; and through the comments of former owners, great critics, or former statesmen, he senses keenly his own continuity with the past.

Instruments and Techniques of Painting

Reading nine†

The Four Treasures

The Chinese regard the seemingly inanimate rocks, streams, and mountains of the landscape with reverence, and it is in this regard also that they look with considerable respect and pride upon the tools and materials of their art. As we have seen, the line formed with brush and ink is the basis of Chinese painting, and in this excerpt from his book, *The Essence of Chinese Painting*, German art historian Roger Goepper describes the importance of the materials to the artist and the relationship that has developed between them.

In all Chinese arts technique has not merely been recognized as the essential vehicle of expression and the cultivation of the artist's personality, but has also been credited with an aesthetic value of its own. Hence the Chinese painter or calligrapher regarded the tools of his craft with a special esteem and not merely as means to an end. The Jesuit missionaries were struck by this fact as long ago as the eighteenth century, and one of them wrote on the subject: 'the learned men take extreme care that all their writing things, marble, ink, brush, are tidy and in good order; just as our soldiers see to it that their rifle is in good condition. Hence they give their brush, paper, ink and marble the name *sse pao*, the Four Treasures, which they are accustomed to bestow upon the four greatest treasures.' The preparation of the colours, the setting up of the table, and

the grinding and preparation of the ink form an inalienable part of the creative process, since through these preparations the artist's will to expression is concentrated upon his media and their potentialities, and is simultaneously set free from everyday things that might disturb and hinder the creative process. Again and again in Chinese treatises, the preparation of the implements and physical media is described as an act which purifies the artist's spirit and enables him to concentrate on the creation of the painting. Perhaps this attitude explains why the utensils employed in writing or painting were not looked upon as mere utilitarian instruments or materials requiring no particular attention. Considerable care was lavished upon their manufacture so that they became things of beauty. The handle of the brush was made of jade or rare species of spotted

† Roger Goepper, *The Essence of Chinese Painting* (London: Lund Humphries, 1963).

bamboo, and especial attention was paid to the rough stone on which the ink was ground with water. In early times it was fashioned of porcelain or stoneware, whereas later very simple shapes cut out of black slate were preferred; after painting it had to be washed clean – if possible in a clear mountain stream – and put away carefully. The striving for beauty of shape is most strikingly manifested, however, in the round blocks, and later bars, in which the ink and paint were supplied ready to be ground on the stone with the addition of water. These blocks and bars were pressed in decorative moulds which had often been designed by well-known artists, and famous centres of ink manufacture became established whose family industries sometimes published expensive sample catalogues. In fact a whole aesthetical literature grew up around the 'Four Precious Things of a Writing Desk,' as the painting and writing utensils, namely brush, ink, grinding-stone, and paper, were called. Thus the Ming writer and painter Chên Chi-ju (1558–1639) remarks: 'The relation of the literatus to his inkstone is like that of a beautiful woman to her mirror: throughout the whole of their life they are the most familiar objects.'

Green Jade Brush. 18th century

Avery Brundage Collection, M. H. De Young Memorial Museum



Porcelain Brush Holder. 15th century



Jade Brush Holder. Ch'ing period



Chinese Calligraphy

Calligraphy and painting are closely allied in Chinese art. The intricate characters composed of several simple brushstrokes require of the calligrapher an eye trained to the form, balance, and strength of each individual stroke and the entire character. For the scholar and painter, this meant long years of assiduous study and practice in writing, first to commit to memory and to master the form of thousands of characters, learning the sequence of strokes and developing grace in the handling of the brush. When this was done the scholar began to develop his own style, perhaps in the manner of some revered master, but as distinctive as the writer's own personality. In this excerpt from his book, *Chinese Calligraphy*, Chiang Yee discusses the abstract qualities of the characters and the relationship between painting and calligraphy.

Abstract Beauty

To the Chinese themselves, calligraphy is the most fundamental artistic manifestation of the national mind. Rhythm, line, and structure are more perfectly embodied in calligraphy than in painting or sculpture, and even form and movement appear in it in at least equal measure. Every Chinese character, built up in its own square, presents to the calligrapher an almost infinite variety of problems of structure and composition; and when executed it presents to the reader a formal design the abstract beauty of which is capable of drawing the mind away from the

literal meaning of the characters. Many of our scholars have confessed that they have almost lost their minds in contemplating the miraculous lines and structures of some of our characters—characters so combined as to introduce indirectly to the thought aesthetically satisfying equilibria of visual forces and movements. For there is in every piece of fine Chinese writing a harmony which is a source of pleasure over and above the pleasure of apprehending the thought.

I cannot write of the abstract beauty of Chinese calligraphy without mentioning some of the most vital movements in contemporary Western art, such as Surreal-

†Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

ism. There is, after all, nothing essentially new in Surrealism; to the Chinese mind, accustomed through many centuries to an attitude of receptivity towards purely linear beauty, its principles cause no shock. A piece of our most ancient script, composed perhaps five thousand years ago, and a Surrealist drawing of the 20th century produce very similar aesthetic emotions. Compare, for example, the Chinese word *Fu* 福 in the ancient script with this drawing by Hans Arp 福. Viewed as realistic representations, both appear strange, but viewed as abstract designs they are extremely fascinating.

The Chinese value calligraphy, as I have already said, purely for the sake of the satisfactory nature of its lines and groups of lines; they acknowledge no necessity for the thought expressed to be beautiful. The aesthetic of Chinese calligraphy is simply this: that a beautiful form should be beautifully executed. A piece of writing lacking the second factor would be merely vulgar. An identical series of characters can be written by two hands, and though the lines described are precisely the same, with no difference at all between the curves and the structures, the work of the one hand will be an object of joyful contemplation while the work of the other appears so common that the untutored onlooker feels he could do as well himself! A fine stroke by a good calligrapher is not easy to analyse, still less to imitate. Its aesthetic quality does not vary with the changes of fashion; many other styles may—and always do—succeed it, but it remains as satisfying and admirable as when it was first conceived.

The fundamental inspiration of calligraphy, as of all the arts in China, is nature. Our love of nature is characterized

by a desire to identify our minds with her and so enjoy her as she is. In calligraphy we are drawn to nature in the same irresistible way: every stroke, every dot suggests the form of a natural object. And, in turn, natural objects become in many instances prototypes of calligraphic styles.

Every Chinese character roughly fills a square, and for this reason its exponents have unusual freedom for composition and attitude. But this freedom has its laws. For each character there is a definite number of strokes and appointed positions for them in relation to the whole, the shape differing with the different styles. No stroke may be added or deleted for the sake of decorative effect. Chinese characters were evolved by process of artistic simplification from observed objects, and it would be a travesty of this origin were unnecessary parts to be added or necessary parts omitted in the interests of some impulse towards 'beautification.'

The definite and well-knit strokes of a Chinese character can be composed into many individual patterns according to the talent of the calligrapher. Thus:

春 晉商 春 春 春

Print Chüan-shu Li-shu Li Jui-ching

春 春 春 春

K'ai-Shu After After By
after Yen Chéng-ch'ing Liu Kung-ch'uan Chao
Ou-yang Hsün Chih-ch'ien

Chun, spring

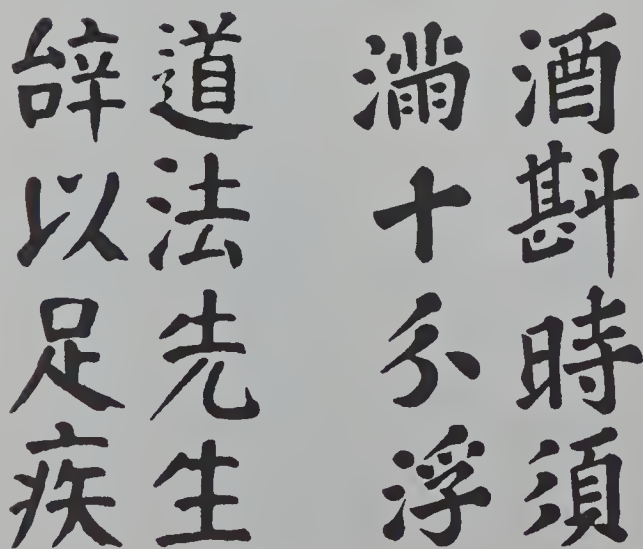
Each of these examples, with the exception of the printed type, has its own pattern distinguished by sharply individualized shape of stroke and arrangement of the strokes in the character. Strict regularity is not required; the writer has only to consult his taste and establish a general balance. The essential thing is that the pattern should have a living movement.

It is of especial significance that the arrangement of the different parts of a character to form an organic whole can be done only with the subtlest appreciation of artistic values. Firstly, all the strokes of a character must be grouped so that they not only balance perfectly with each other but together form a unit which is complete in itself and which would be upset if any stroke were to be taken away. Finally, the whole character must have, not static symmetry, but a dynamic posture, the atti-

tude of a moving figure in momentary equilibrium.

A calligrapher's aim is not merely legibility and the making of a page pleasant to look at—the desiderata, I believe, of good Western manuscripts, but the expression of thought, personality, and design together. For us, it is not a purely decorative art. A satisfying piece of it can be executed only by a scholar of marked personality, and preferably one with poetical, literary and musical tastes. One could practise writing for years and still fail to achieve a good hand if one did not at the same time cultivate one's personality. Accomplished vulgarity in writing is unfortunately only too common.

Chinese calligraphy—a lively conception of some equilibrium of forces—can only be achieved by concentrated and unremitting scholarly study.



Two examples of Chinese calligraphy: Yen Chêng-ch'ing (l.), a high official in the army, a statesman and a calligrapher; and Su Tungpo (r.), writer, poet, painter, and calligrapher of the Sung dynasty (A.D. 907–1279).

"The fundamental inspiration of calligraphy, as of all the arts in China, is nature."

Conclusions

1. What are the objectives of Chinese painting?
2. Why does the landscape predominate in Chinese painting?
3. Discuss the symbolism and traditions associated with the subject matter of painting. Why are similar themes and subjects repeated throughout the history of painting in China?
4. What is the *Tao* and how is it expressed through the medium of painting?
5. Describe the relationship—esthetic, cultural, and historical—between painting and calligraphy.
6. Compare and contrast art and the role of the artist in China and the West.

Suggested Readings

Bowie, Theodore. *East-West in Art: Patterns of Cultural and Aesthetic Relationships*, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1966.* A view of East-West relationships in the arts emphasizing the role of diffusion, the migration of cultural products from one civilization to another. The author's technique is that of confrontation, in which over 300 reproductions of painting and sculpture are juxtaposed to illustrate the process of cultural interchange.

Cahill, James. *Chinese Painting*, New York: Skira, 1967. The finest survey of Chinese painting available, including 86 color plates set into a lucid, articulate introduction to the history of painting in China.

Jenyns, Soame. *A Background to Chinese Painting*, New York: Schocken, 1966.* A brief and highly readable description of the aesthetic, social, philosophical, and religious setting within which Chinese painting developed.

Rowland, Benjamin, Jr. *Art in East and West*, Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1964.* A collection of sculpture and paintings representing the Oriental and Occidental points of view and illustrating accidental parallels in the art of the East and the West. The author's purpose in comparing works of art widely separated in time and place is to allow them to reflect on each other and thus reveal something of their respective cultures.

Schafer, Edward H. *Ancient China*, New York: Time-Life Books, 1967. A vivid recreation of daily life in ancient China from the Bronze-Age Shang dynasty (c. 1500-1000 B.C.) through the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-907) illustrated with striking color reproductions of bronzes, sculpture, and painting. Chronologies and bibliography.

Sirén, Osvald. *The Chinese on the Art of Painting*, New York: Schocken, 1963.* Presents the writings and comments of Chinese painter-critics from the fourth through the nineteenth centuries, in which is illuminated the intentions and reflections of the artists and their aesthetic aims and ideals.

* Paperbound Edition.

University of Alberta Library



0 1620 0710 0348

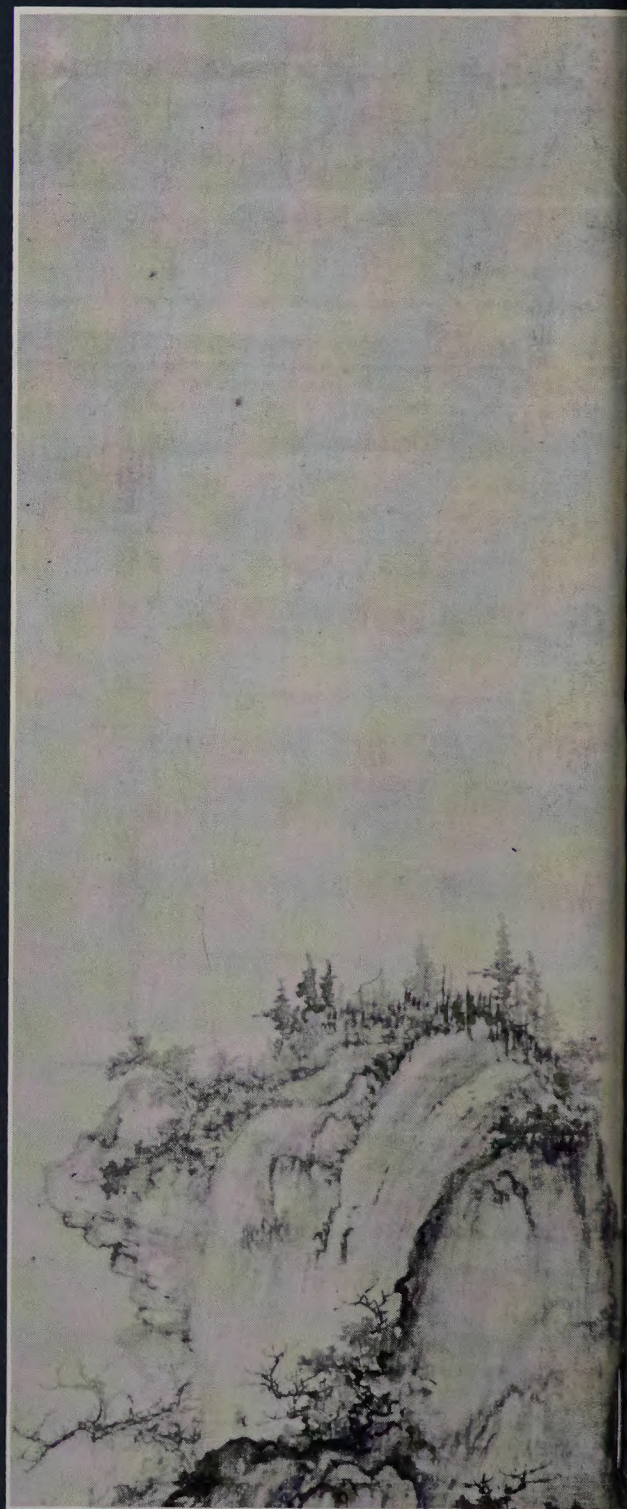
BB369

John U. Michaelis

Robin J. McKeown

Coordinators

Asian Studies Inquiry Program



Field Educational Publications

A Subsidiary of Field Enterprises, Incorporated